Church Continues Nixon Role

1/10/74

By William R. MacKaye
Washington Post Staff Writer

Members of the modestly sized but fiercely energetic Unification Church of the United States, who in recent weeks have become President Nixon's most formidable supporters in the world of religion, last evening wound up their 40-day prayer and fast for the Watergate crisis.

But Neil Albert Salonen, the president of the international denomination's U.S. branch, made it clear in an interview that the church's efforts to promote forgiveness and support for the President will continue in other forms. He says firmly that the project is religious, not political.

The church's efforts to persuade Americans to "Forgive, Love, Unite!" won their widest audience when more than 1,000 sign-waving participants in the campaign showed up Dec. 14 for President Nixon's lighting of the national Christmas tree.

The church also attracted attention with full-page ads published in the newspapers of 21 cities that sounded the summons to the forgiveness campaign. Church officials said they spent $73,000 on these advertisements, which appeared in The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times and a number of other major papers.

Salonen said the church's decision to urge forgiveness for President Nixon arose out of a communication from God to the church's founder, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon. "Rev. Moon received a direct revelation from God that we ought to forgive this man," Salonen explained.

The revelation, according to Salonen's account, came to Mr. Moon during a brief visit he paid to his home in Korea in November.

The rough outlines of the campaign were then communicated to the church headquarters here in a Trans-Paicific telephone call from Col. Pak Bo Hi, Mr. Moon's translator.

The newspaper advertisements generated more than 13,000 responses from readers, more than 90 per cent of them favorable, church officials said.

Salonen and Dan Fefferman, who has served as national coordinator of the prayer and fast, said that the next phase of their effort to promote a national uniting around the figure of President Nixon would be waged on the state level.

Typical of the programs they plan to broaden popular awareness of the church and its cause was one held Monday on the F Street Plaza where about 50 church members, some dressed as figures from U. S. history, sang patriotic songs and chanted such slogans as "God needs Nixon," "God supports Nixon," and "We support Nixon."

Members of the Unification Church number about 10,000 in this country, according to church officials, and hold to a modification of orthodox Christian belief worked out by Mr. Moon that looks to an imminent rebirth of Christ. According to Mr. Moon's teaching the new Christ will marry.

Converts to the Unification Church, who are predominately white and mostly college educated, are not permitted to marry (unless they are already married) until they have been specially singled out for matrimony by Mr. Moon.

Since the church's first wedding was performed in 1960, a ceremony that united Mr. Moon to his present wife and also included three other couples, a total of 1,439 couples have been authorized to marry.